



The Red Sailboat

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/252-The-Red-Sailboat>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll embark on a vibrant journey to capture the essence of a striking red sailboat anchored against the turquoise waters of a tropical paradise. This scene, with its vivid contrasts and serene setting, offers a rewarding challenge for any painter. We'll be working on a 12x16 inch board, primed and ready for your creative touch. Using a mid-grey plastic palette, I'll guide you through the selection of synthetic brushes, primarily flats and a few angles, down to the long rigger brush for those intricate details that bring the rigging to life. The lesson unfolds in six manageable steps, starting with preparing your canvas by sealing the base layer with an acrylic medium. This crucial step ensures a smooth, stress-free painting process. You'll learn to spotlight the background, build translucent water, and make that red sailboat pop with punchy color and crisp details. Whether you're using acrylics or oils, this chapter will enrich your skills and inspire your artistic journey. Let's dive in and explore the beauty of this scene together, one brushstroke at a time.



The Red Sailboat



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Chroma Atelier Interactive Acrylics
- Phthalo Blue
- Brilliant Magenta
- Naphthol Red Light
- Primary Yellow
- Titanium White
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette knife
- Paper towels
- Bucket of water

1 Preparing the stage



Prepare the Stage

Ensure your canvas is ready by applying a base layer. This foundational layer is crucial for the painting's success.

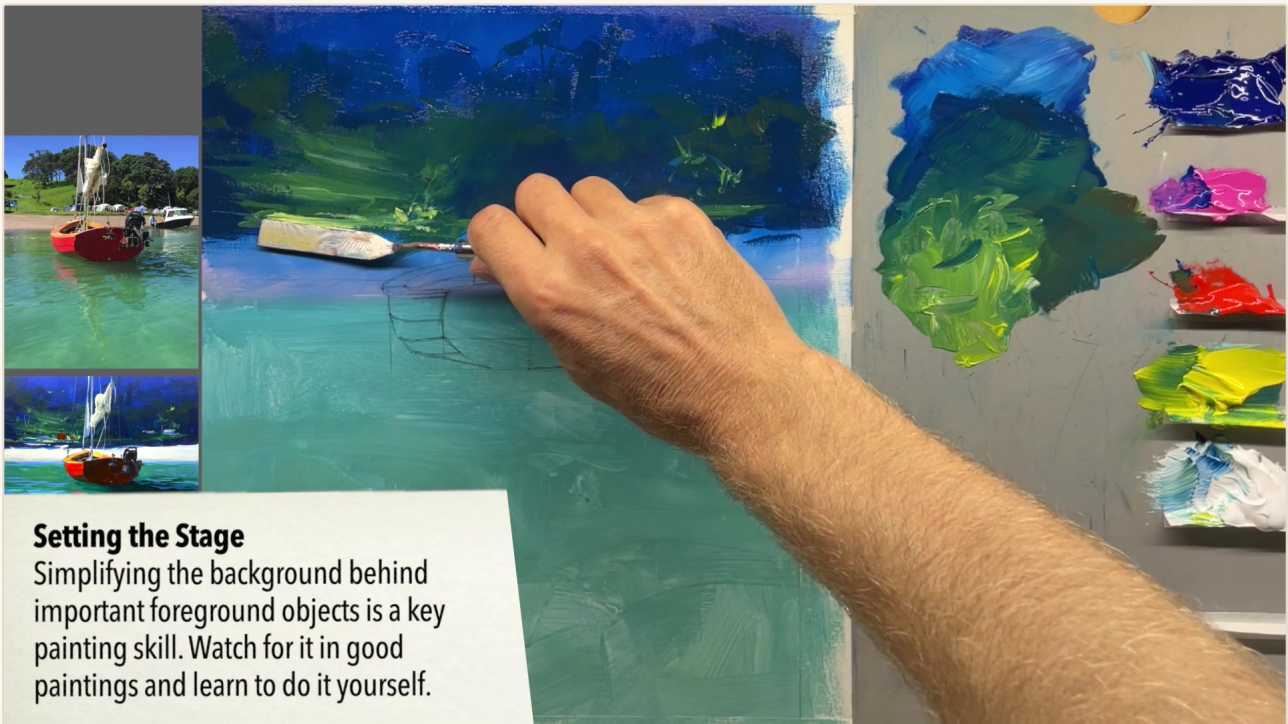
Seal the Base Layer

Use an acrylic medium to seal the base layer. This prevents any disturbance to the base when adding subsequent layers, allowing for a stress-free painting experience.

PRO TIP

Sealing the base layer with acrylic medium ensures a smooth and uninterrupted painting process.

2 Painting the background with spotlights



Setting the Stage

Simplifying the background behind important foreground objects is a key painting skill. Watch for it in good paintings and learn to do it yourself.

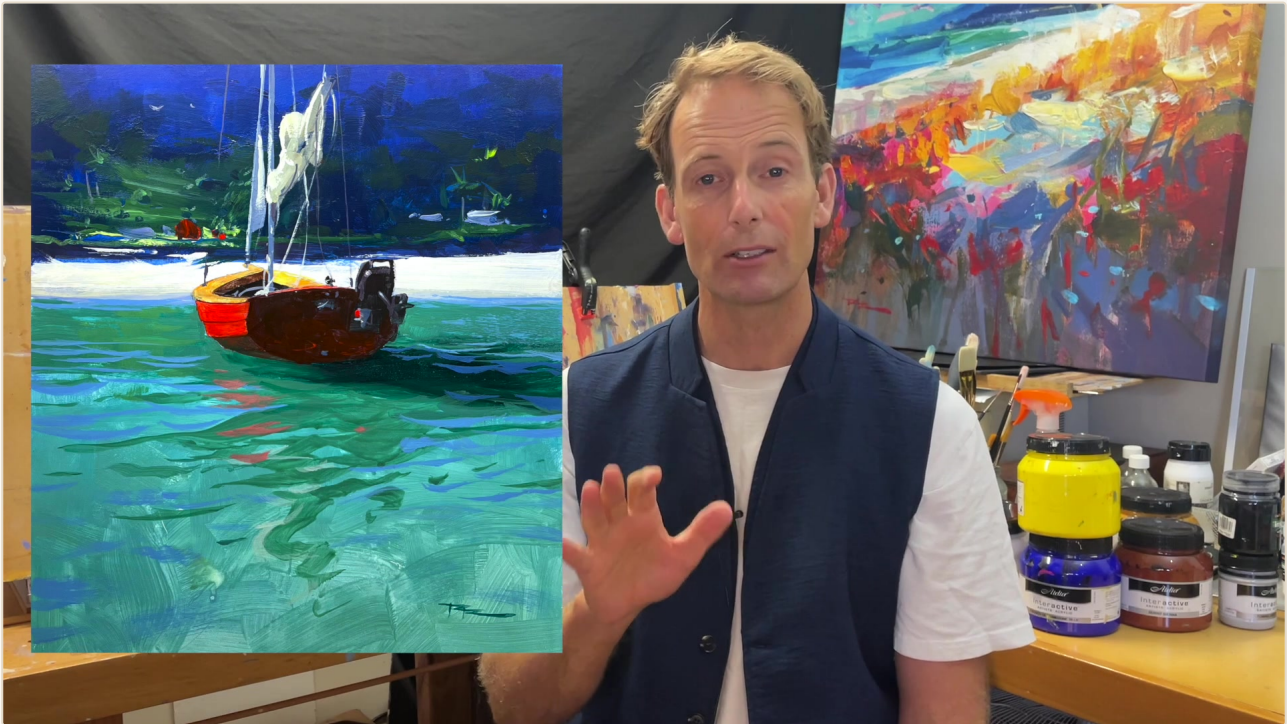
Subdue the Background

Subdue the area behind the center of interest in the foreground. This technique helps to create depth and focus in your painting. Apply it consistently across your artworks for effective results.

PRO TIP

Subduing the background enhances the focus on the foreground elements.

3 Painting the water



Create the Base Layer

Start by painting a base layer of the water using a mix of blue and a touch of green. This will form the foundation for the translucent effect. Use broad, horizontal strokes to mimic the natural flow of water.

Add Depth with Shadows

Mix a darker shade of blue by adding a small amount of black to your base color. Apply this in areas where shadows would naturally occur, such as beneath the boat or along the water's edge, to give the water depth.

Highlight with Light Reflections

Mix a lighter blue by adding white to your base color. Gently brush this onto the water's surface where light would naturally reflect, creating a shimmering effect.

PRO TIP

Use horizontal strokes to capture the natural flow and movement of water.

4 Painting the boat



Paint the Boat

Focus on creating a vibrant color for the boat. Use the most saturated hues available to make the boat stand out against the background. Apply the paint with confident, crisp strokes to capture the fine details of the boat's structure.

PRO TIP

Use the most vibrant colors available to make the boat stand out.

5 Palette and paint handling



Prepare Your Palette

Use Italia Interactive acrylics for vibrant color and easy handling. Place your paints in large tubs to ensure you have enough paint for your work.

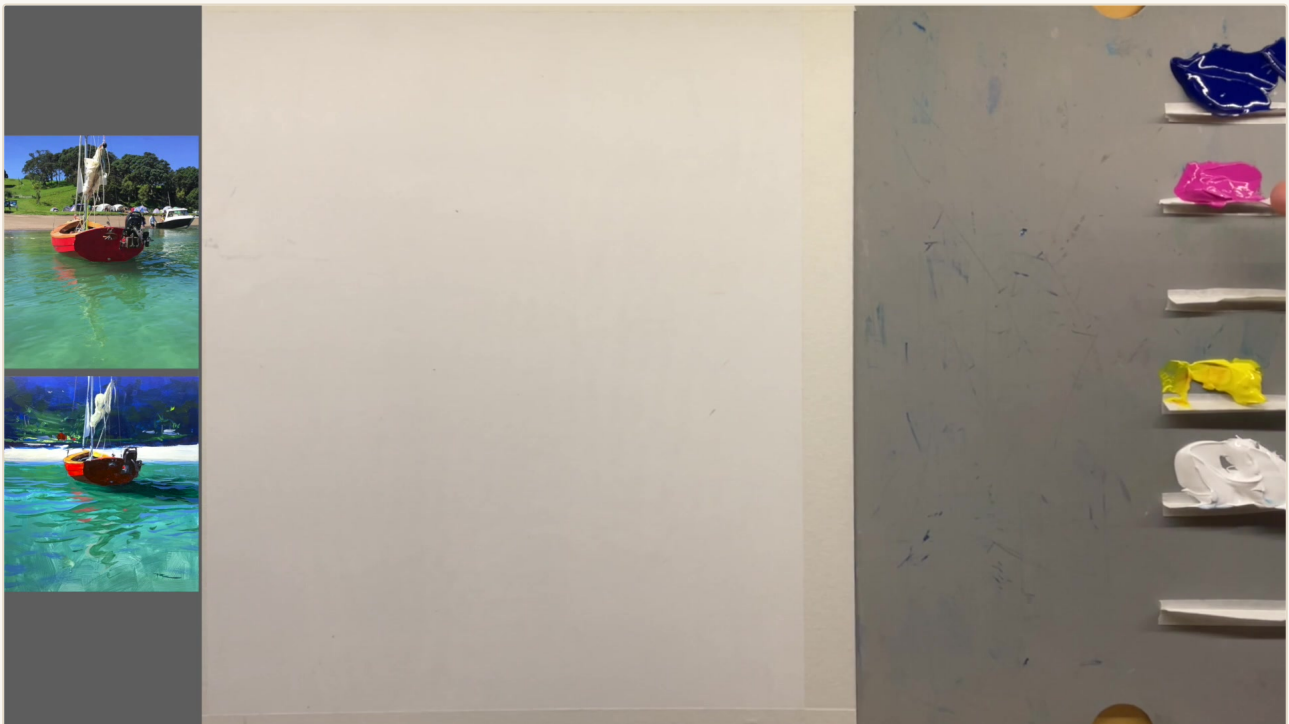
Prevent Paint Drips

Apply small bits of tape to your palette to minimize dribbling. This helps keep your workspace clean and organized.

PRO TIP

Use tape on your palette to prevent paint from dribbling down the board.

6 Painting the first layer



Prepare Your Materials

Use Phthalo Blue, Brilliant Magenta, Primer Yellow, and Titanium White for the first layer. Wet a big flat brush with water and keep a jar of water and a spray bottle nearby to maintain moisture on the canvas.

Apply the Sky Colors

Start at the top of the canvas with Phthalo Blue and Brilliant Magenta. Use big, beautiful strokes to brush the colors on, creating a vibrant backdrop.

Blend the Water Line

Add some Titanium White and a little Brilliant Magenta at the water line to create the backdrop color for the beach. Blend it downwards, as this layer will be painted over later.

Create Turquoise for the Water

Mix Primer Yellow, a bit of Phthalo Blue, and a lot of Titanium White to achieve a turquoise color. Apply this from the beach downwards, using free brushstrokes to create a tropical water effect.

Add Painterly Texture

Be free with your brushstrokes as you reach the bottom of the canvas. Spray a little water to create runs and dribbles, enhancing the painterly texture. Allow the layer to dry for about half an hour.

PRO TIP

Use a spray bottle to keep the canvas wet and create interesting textures with dribbles and runs.

7 Sealing the first layer



Prepare the Surface

Ensure the painting has dried for at least half an hour. Use a hair dryer for five minutes to speed up the drying process if needed.

Apply Gloss Medium Varnish

Pour a small amount of gloss medium varnish onto the painting surface. Use a flat brush to spread it evenly across the top. Opt for a larger brush to save time.

Seal the Colors

Ensure the varnish covers the entire surface to seal in the colors. This prevents the underlying colors from mixing or reactivating when you add new layers.

Choose Your Finish

Select a gloss or matte finish based on your preference. Ensure it is an acrylic sealer that dries quickly to create a permanent clear layer for further painting.

PRO TIP

Use a larger brush to apply the varnish quickly and evenly.

8 Alternative technique for oil painting



Prepare the Base Layer

Use Liquin, a fast-drying alkyd medium, to create a thin layer of fast-drying color when painting the base colors with oils. This will help the layer dry quickly and prepare it for subsequent layers.

Allow Drying Time

Leave the base layer to dry for a day before painting on top of it. This ensures the colors are sealed and won't be lifted by the next layer.

PRO TIP

Liquin acts as its own sealing coat, so there's no need for an additional sealing layer.

9 Keeping acrylics wet



Keep Acrylics Wet

Spray your palette colors with water to prevent them from drying out. Cover the palette with a lid to trap moisture and keep the paints wet for several hours.

PRO TIP

Use a spray bottle to lightly mist your acrylic palette and cover it to maintain moisture and extend working time.

10 Drawing the boat and beach



Determine Beach and Boat Placement

Decide where the top and bottom of the beach will be on your canvas. Use a ruler to extend these lines across the canvas. Position the boat centrally, as this is a portrait of the boat.

Draw the Boat's Rectangle

Lightly sketch a rectangle to represent the boat's placement. Ensure the rectangle aligns with your reference photo for accuracy. The top of the boat should not reach the back of the beach.

Define Boat's Dimensions

Estimate the size of the boat's back, noting that it aligns with the front of the beach. Find the halfway mark between the back and side of the boat, adjusting slightly for perspective.

Sketch the Boat's Structure

Draw the center line of the boat to help with symmetry. Sketch the bottom of the boat, noting it curves slightly upward in segments. Ensure points across the boat align correctly.

Outline the Boat's Bow

Identify the point of the bow and its relation to the center and edge. Ensure the angle runs back to the center point. Sketch the inner edge, allowing for rail thickness.

Refine Boat's Curves

Draw the curves of the boat, ensuring they follow the upper rail and meet the angles. Check the thickness and position of the inside bottom edge.

Add Motor and Mast

Sketch the motor slightly smaller to reduce its prominence. Position the mast leaning slightly to the right. Prepare to paint the background before adding the sail.

PRO TIP

Use a center line for symmetrical objects to ensure accurate proportions and alignment.

11 Painting the background



Prepare the Palette

Add more blue to your palette along with Naphthol Red Light. These colors will be essential for the background.

Paint the Sky

Use a big square flat synthetic brush. Mix blue with a touch of white and apply it to the top of the canvas. If the paint dries too quickly, add a little water to keep it wet for blending.

Create Tree Shapes

Mix dark blue with yellow to create green, then add white. Use the square brush to paint rough tree shapes, aiming for a scooped feel at the top to create a welcoming bay.

Add Depth and Detail

Spray the canvas lightly to keep it wet. Add more yellow, green, and a touch of red to create a dark muted blue-green. Use calligraphic strokes for foliage, ensuring it's darker than the top.

Spotlight Effect

While the paint is still wet, add more yellow and white with a touch of red. Brush from the top to create a spotlight effect on the hill, adding drama and gesture.

Vary the Color

Introduce an orange hue for variety, thinking about grassy areas and tree tops. Use a cleaner, less grey color for a lively effect.

Add Light and Detail

Use a small brush to add details like cabbage trees and palm trees, capturing light. Keep the area behind the mast and sail less detailed to avoid distraction.

Paint the Beach

Mix an orangey color with red, yellow, and mainly white. Apply it at the waterline, keeping it horizontal. Add white to create a flat area for the boat.

PRO TIP

Add water to acrylics if they dry too quickly, allowing for smooth wet-into-wet effects.

12 Preparing to paint the water



Select the Right Brush

Choose a 3/4 inch rosemary angular brush for this part of the painting. Wet the brush to prepare it for painting the water.

Decide on Painting Order

Opt to paint the water before the boat. This approach allows you to focus on the background and save the focal point for later.

PRO TIP

Wet your brush before starting to ensure smooth application of paint.

13 Painting the water details



Prepare the Surface

Spray the canvas lightly to keep the paints wet, especially in warm conditions. This will help maintain soft edges and allow for smoother blending.

Paint the Shadow Under the Boat

Mix a dark muted blue-green by adding red to green, as red is opposite green on the color wheel. Apply this color under the boat, where the shadow is cast, using quick brushstrokes to maintain soft edges.

Transition to Lighter Greens

Add green to the edges of the shadow area and spray lightly to keep the paint wet. Gradually mix in a little white and blue to create a lighter turquoise color, aiming for a smooth transition.

Adjust for Acrylic Drying

Remember that acrylics dry darker than they appear when wet. Adjust your mix by adding more yellow and spraying to keep the paint workable. Work quickly to maintain the desired color.

Create Fine Brushstrokes

Use an angular brush on its side to create fine, delicate strokes. Avoid painting over the purple areas and thin the paint with water to achieve broken edges that suggest wave movement.

Add Reflective Highlights

Mix a stronger yellow with a little white for a bright reflective section. Apply this with a lot of water to create a watercolor effect, using downward strokes at a slight angle to mimic gentle U-shaped wavelets.

Incorporate Sky Reflections

Add some blue to represent the sky reflection over the water. This will enhance the reflective quality and complete the look of the water surface.

PRO TIP

Use an angular brush on its side for fine, delicate strokes to suggest wave movement.

14 Preparing the boat for vibrant color



Prepare the Boat's Surface

Wash your brush thoroughly to remove any previous color. Apply a layer of white paint to the side of the boat, focusing on just two panels. This white base will ensure the red paint appears as vibrant and intense as possible.

PRO TIP

Use a white base under vibrant colors to enhance their intensity.

15 Adding sky reflections



Mix Sky Reflection Color

Use a clean brush to mix blue and white for the sky reflection. Add a tiny touch of yellow and a little Brilliant Magenta to the mix. Spray lightly to keep the paint wet.

Apply Sky Reflection

Apply the mixed color with very fine strokes, especially closer to the land. Use horizontal strokes to suggest broken water and gusts of wind.

Vary Brush Strokes

Use your brush calligraphically to create varied and interesting strokes. Change the direction of your brush to avoid uniformity in the strokes.

Add Foreground Strokes

Create soft edge strokes in the foreground, making them smaller and thinner as they recede into the distance.

Darken Under the Boat

Add a little more blue to darken the strokes under the boat, as this area is in shadow. Consider adding a touch of yellow to push the color towards green, keeping in mind it will dry darker.

PRO TIP

Use varied brush directions to create dynamic and interesting water reflections.

16 Painting the boat details



Paint the Sail Reflection

Mix a bright red with a touch of yellow to create a vibrant color. Carefully apply this over the white area of the sail to achieve a striking contrast. Ensure the edges are neat to maintain the sail's shape.

Add Woodwork Details

Switch to a small flat brush, size 6, and mix an orange for the woodwork. Apply this over the white base to make the color pop. Add a little white if needed to enhance the brightness.

Create Dark Brown for Interior

Mix a dark brown by combining orange with blue. Apply this carefully to the interior, paying attention to the curves. For a darker shade, add more red and blue.

Define Boat Angles

Use red to outline the boat's back collar, ensuring straight edges and correct angles. Fill in the space, and add more light to the back for richness in color.

Reflect Light on Water

With a rig-a-brush, apply red to create light reflections on the water. If too strong, tone it down by brushing over it lightly.

Detail the Motor

Mix a grayish tone using red and blue, then lighten with white. Apply to the motor, focusing on where the light touches. Squint to simplify details and ensure accuracy.

Reflect Green Water

Notice the panels reflecting green water. Apply a little yellow over these areas to capture the reflection. Adjust with more green if necessary to seat the boat in the water.

PRO TIP

Squint at your subject to simplify details and focus on getting the big shapes and angles right.

17 Final touches and signing



Add Reflections and Highlights

Mix a light red using white and yellow. Apply another coat of red on the boat, adding a touch of orange to create a slight curve. Enhance the light with a punchier tone on the back of the boat.

Paint the Rigging and Mast

Mix a blue-grey for the rigging. Use a protractor to determine the position of the mast. Apply the paint carefully, using a ruler if needed, to ensure straight lines.

Create Warm Tones on the Sail

Mix yellow, red, and a little white to achieve a warm beige. Tone it down with blue if necessary. Apply this mixture where the light hits the sail, going warmer and lighter under the sail.

Apply Highlights

Mix white with a touch of yellow for highlights. Use chunky paint and apply it with the tip of the brush to create a thick texture. Add highlights to the front of the boat.

Draw Ropes and Details

Use a rigger brush loaded evenly with paint. Practice strokes to determine the rope's path. Ensure the paint is fluid enough for smooth application. Add darker ropes by mixing grey and adjusting the water content.

Add Final Touches and Sign

Include small details like seagulls and additional light on trees. Choose a subtle color for your signature, such as a blue-green, and place it where it doesn't stand out too much. Carefully remove the tape to reveal clean edges.

PRO TIP

Use a sealing layer of acrylic gloss medium between layers to easily correct mistakes by wiping them off.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by preparing your canvas with a solid base layer, sealed with an acrylic medium for a smooth start. As you build your composition, focus on creating depth by subduing the background and using vibrant colors for your focal point, the red sailboat. This contrast will guide the viewer's eye and bring your subject to life.

When painting the water, use a mix of blues and greens with horizontal strokes to capture its natural flow and movement. Pay attention to light and shadow to add depth and realism. As you move to the boat, apply vibrant, saturated colors with confident strokes to make it stand out against the serene backdrop.

Throughout the process, keep your paints workable by maintaining moisture on your palette and canvas. Use varied brush techniques to add texture and interest, and don't forget to seal your layers to preserve your work. As you add the final details, focus on the big shapes and angles, ensuring your painting captures the essence of the scene.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Seal the base layer with acrylic medium for a smooth painting process.
- Subdue the background to enhance focus on the foreground elements.
- Use horizontal strokes to capture the natural flow and movement of water.
- Apply vibrant colors to make the boat stand out against the background.
- Use tape on your palette to prevent paint from dribbling.
- Keep the canvas wet with a spray bottle to create interesting textures.
- Use a white base under vibrant colors to enhance their intensity.
- Squint at your subject to simplify details and focus on big shapes and angles.

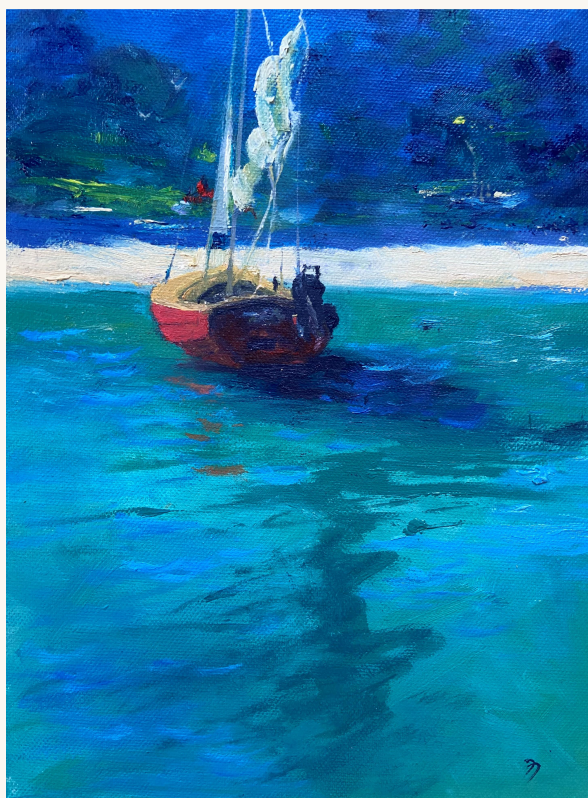


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Student Critiques

Club members painted their own versions of this scene and I critiqued each one. Their paintings — and my feedback — are a wonderful way to see this lesson's ideas in action.

"The Red Boat - 9" x 12" Oils on Canvas Board by Fay Thomson" by Fay Thomson



The Red Boat - 9" x 12" Oils on Canvas Board by Fay Thomson

Hi Fay, I love your approach with this one. The colour is scintillating and your brushwork is beautiful and painterly. I like that you changed the composition and tried to balance the boat on the left with that long elegant dark reflection.

However, what is that a reflection of? That's the question it leaves me asking. You might have been better off using a squiggly line of sea foam instead.

Other than that hiccup, gorgeous!

“"The Red Boat" in acrylics by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.” by **Eric Hillmer**



"The Red Boat" in acrylics by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Hey Eric, lots of beautifully painted engaging detail in this one. Lovely to see the camping situation brought to life and the crisp details in the boat. I'd advise removing the tent behind the mast as it competes with the foreground.

It looks to me like you lost your way in the water there whereas the rest of the painting is very well finished. To get a grip on this complex subject I'd recommend you do the same as Louise and paint a few studies of this section in just black and white. Works wonders.

“Red Sailboat Acrylics and Oils” by Nancy Newton



Red Sailboat Acrylics and Oils

Hi Nancy, nice to see you doing this one. Your extra dark background has really made the light on the beach pop out - very tropical! Your colours in the water and boat are good too. Lovely calligraphic brushwork in the reflections - not easy to do and you gave it a sterling effort! You've scumbled it a bit in there though, leaving some of the wavy shapes less resolved that they could be. Still, very nice.

Last little thing, your wires on the boat should be angling up towards the top of the mast.

“Red Sailboat, 12 x 16 Oil” by Louise Villegas



Red Sailboat, 12 x 16 Oil

Hi Louise, good job with the drawing of the boat, the vibrant colours throughout and the painterly wet-in-wet brushwork.

I like that you've lightened the red in the back of the boat but it could stand being a little darker around the motor which should be blocking some light on that surface.

The reflection of the boat and sail could do with another try. Currently they're too light and too regular or pattern-like.

A helpful exercise for you would be to paint on a separate canvas a few of these watery reflections using just black and white paint, (after converting the reference image into black and white). That would take colour out of the equation for you for a while so you could just focus on the shapes and the values.

Every painting is practice for the next one. Enjoy the process!